

**Statements from Members of the  
Health District Planning Committee**

This winter I was asked by Peter Hovell to represent the Board of Finance on the Health District Planning Committee. After many months of meetings, discussions and revisions, I can state that I unequivocally support the formation of a Health District.

Set out below are the main reasons that I am in favor of the Health District:-

- 1) **A significant increase in services without an increase in costs to Darien-**The Health District (as currently planned) would provide for needs assessment and planning, incident response (bioterrorism, pandemic flu, environmental health, food borne diseases) environmental health (full compliance of state mandates is planned in the Health District compared to the current shortfall) preventative health (immunization, health education & prevention, communicable disease monitoring etc), and involvement in the planning table regarding State Issued Guidance ( Districts are the main planning components of state plans). Currently, the town has only part-compliance with state mandates, no needs assessment and planning, no incident response function, limited preventative health and no involvement in state planning. Darien deserves better.
- 2) **Employees to be called upon in an emergency.** Right now the town of Darien has no full time employees to be called upon in an emergency. Dr McLaughlin is a part time employee of the town and has a full time job in NYC. Vince Proto and his employees are contract employees and Darien is not their only client. The Health District as planned would provide a full time Director (MPH), 4 sanitarians, a ½ time RN and a contractual (part time) MD in addition to administrative staff.
- 3) **The District is a separate legal entity.** The District is a separate legal entity created by state statute and all risk resides within the Health District. If Darien is not happy with the progress of the District it can legally dissolve it after 2 years.
- 4) **Fiscally Responsible Plan-** The Board of Finance has requested that the town not increase its headcount and last year requested a reduction in head count. This plan would give the town much needed services without increasing headcount or the cost to the town for services. Failure to approve the Health District would leave the town with no other option than forming a fulltime Health Department, which would be much more expensive and provide much less service than a Health District.
- 5) **Increased funding from the state-**The state has provided higher levels of funding to Health Districts to encourage greater levels of public health services at a lower cost to towns.
- 6) **Availability for further state and federal grants-** As part of a Health District we would be eligible for further state and federal grants which could be used to provide increased services to the town.

As the RTM reviews the Health District material I would suggest that they review the aforementioned reasons.

Barbara Cook

To: Members of the RTM

From: Nancy Herling, member of the Darien/New Canaan Health District Planning Committee and the Darien Social Services Commission

"Joint Health Districts will offer economies of scale and a means in which to share expertise across such artificial boundaries" New Canaan Advertiser  
8/24/2006

I am strongly in favor of forming the Health District with New Canaan. As an active member of the Planning Committee from February to July, it quickly became clear that this is a smart move for our town. Barbara Cook's letter goes into wonderful detail highlighting the benefits, so not to repeat them I just want to emphasize the importance of working together with our neighbors in matters that WILL cross our boundaries. As a former health educator I produced programs that I delivered to multiple towns, it was the only way to do so. What a waste not to collaborate and share. A fulltime department serving two towns will result in more programs and quality programs—these on top of meeting state requirements and its time to do so!

The State wants this to happen so they can communicate and help in quality delivery of programming and testing. This includes money back from Hartford—rare these days!

Finally, Darien will have the majority of members on the board governing the District—we are not giving away control but reaching out and working with our neighbors for the future welfare of our towns.



## HEALTH DISTRICT SUMMARY

Susan Young, Selectman  
Member of the Health District Planning Committee  
September 1, 2006

I oppose formation of a Health District with New Canaan. The Health District proposal, as presented:

1. Will not continue or improve the present level of services.
2. Removes local Care and Control from Darien.
3. Results in costs to Darien much higher than claimed.

We are being asked by the state to dismantle our Health Department and our town's responsibility to our citizens for a mere \$24,000 incremental incentive. That amount of money does not even begin to address the added bureaucracy of a Health District.

In February 2006 an Ad Hoc committee was formed.

"This team is charged with preparing a proposal for the development of a joint Darien and New Canaan Health District." There is no mention of the need to "determine" or "investigate" whether a district would be in our best interests.

This disconnect between missions may partially explain why requests for reliable data and usable information have been thwarted. This was not an intellectual exercise of pros and cons or debate, but rather, a one- sided marketing job of convincing the committee representatives of the merits of a health district.

### COSTS and SERVICES

In theory, a health district is very compelling if it shares costs and expertise, increasing services and decreasing costs. However, as the data was presented, it was clear that saving money was not the top priority or a reality.

In my report to the Board on February 21, I stated a concern that even though "The state would increase the per capita money for a district, from 49c to \$1.66 that the State often starts out funding a project and then cuts it. We need to weigh the financial advantages against that possibility." In Section 19a-245 Reimbursement by State, the Districts received:

Year	Reimbursement Per Capita
1998	\$1.79
2000	\$1.99
2003	\$1.66

State law requires the services of a local health director in each town. Each town may establish their own municipal **health departments** or a health district. By increasing our department to full time, the State will increase our per capita from \$0.49 to \$0.94 - a difference of only \$8,900. The state says that if we form a District with another town that they will contribute \$1.66 per capita or \$34,000. That does not even pay one staff salary.

For the additional \$24,000 we are asked to:

- (i) dismantle our current department and
- (ii) lose our excellent Medical Doctor and our three licensed and certified sanitarians.

The Health District then becomes a governing body of its own, reports to no one in either town, and consists of three board members from Darien and two from New Canaan. Even the state realizes that to be more efficient, additional towns need to join the district. Our ability to decide on what services Darien receives will diminish as New Canaan's population increases, and if more towns are added to the District.

One of the frustrations of trying to find actual costs was that the comparative numbers kept changing. This was not intentional, it was a product of the presenters not understanding the full scope of work to be done in each town.

The numbers presented in August showed the number of inspections in Darien for only a 7-month period rather than a full year. Vince Proto provided a report that showed his department provided 166 inspections in a year. The HD only used the YTD numbers of 111. What this means is that their research was faulty even when it would have been in their favor. Another area was the number of restaurants in each town. The HD Committee maintains that New Canaan has only 83 restaurants. However, on August 10 we asked and received the bill that shows that New Canaan paid for 93 (different) restaurant inspections, and each restaurant was named.

## GRANTS

Local health departments and health districts can apply for grants. They must present a program plan for moneys, budget and evidence of matching municipal funds, in some cases, as required by law. Therefore, grants are not income. Money received must be spent on that particular purpose. Grants do not subsidize a health district. (page 24 [www.dph.state.ct.us/oppe/sha99](http://www.dph.state.ct.us/oppe/sha99)) Not all Health Districts receive the same grants; they must qualify by population. Also, local **health departments** are not excluded from receiving grants.

## PERSONNEL

Our health department consists of highly qualified and licensed people - an MD, and three certified sanitarians. Plan reviews are performed by the person who teaches Plan Review at a Federal level. Dr. McLaughlin and Vince Proto initiated focus-based inspections, which are more comprehensive inspections performed only by sanitarians trained and licensed in this procedure. Until now, these have not been required by the state. These inspections protect us better, minimizing risks. Mr. Proto's plan to increase the number of inspections at an increase of only \$38.80 an hour demonstrates his commitment to improving the number of inspections in Darien. New Canaan pays a Norwalk inspector \$65.00 an hour for the less stringent inspection. Darien has a



department composed of people who execute the highest standard of inspections and services. Mr. Proto is a contractor who provides over 30 public health services to our community and charges an hourly rate. These people are known and respected in the community. While it is true that they may apply for jobs in the new district, the Health District budgeted salaries are lower than current salaries.

By forming a Health district, we risk losing these supremely qualified people. The salaries budgeted for the proposed districts are not competitive in Fairfield County.

## **PLANNING**

Sharing resources and planning can be done at any time and on any topic with any town, even as an independent Health Department. Wilton is partnering with Westport and Weston for their mutual benefit in planning for emergencies and bio-terrorism. Wilton is not a member of the Westport-Weston Health district.

## **EMERGENCIES**

All emergencies are local and the first 72 hours of any emergency must be handled at a local level. Even as a district, we are on our own. Health Districts are not the planning body of community emergencies. Emergencies are coordinated through a line of communication with the fire, police, Red Cross, health department, volunteer emergency (Post 53) and administration of each town.

We should not confuse the Department of Homeland Security with the State Health Department.

## **LOCAL CARE and CONTROL**

Currently, we decide the services our town needs. By increasing the number of hours for personnel, as we voted on August 21, we are taking the needed step to become compliant in the number of inspections performed. What other services we want our health department to perform has not even been discussed. What should we provide without duplicating services performed through our schools, other agencies and our local hospitals?

Right now, 100% of our dollars are spent 100% on services in Darien. We need to address the issues of our community. Our demographics call for different services than what the state requires in cities and rural areas. In fact, even though New Canaan is right next-door, their requirements for service are very different from ours.

Much has been discussed about local control, and most of it misunderstood. The District says we do not lose control because we will have three representatives on the District Board.

If a District is formed, it is an entity onto itself. When this new entity determines the budget, Darien will receive a bill that it will pay to the district. The district may increase fees each year up to 7%. Darien's three representatives on the board are the only gatekeepers between our town and the district.

Darien's government is one of checks and balances. We have voters, Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance, and the RTM. Money spent in our health department is determined by all four participants. It is up to us, the elected officials, to be the gatekeepers and providers of a safe environment.

Our control right now is in hiring excellent people and making the phone call if there are problems. They respond to Darien, not to a district.

### **Conclusion**

I believe that Darien has benefited from these discussions. We are aware of some areas that need attention. We have acted immediately by increasing funding to our health department so that they will become compliant in the number of inspections required by the state.

**The nature of our town is one of independence and taking care of our own needs in a manner that includes professionalism, direct response, rigorous and high service standards as well as budgetary responsibility.**



As Chairman of the RTM Public Health and Safety Committee, I was asked to attend the Darien / New Canaan Health District Formation Team, which met from February 9th to April 27<sup>th</sup>. The Committee concluded that the people of Darien would be better served by forming a Health District with New Canaan.

I support that decision for many reasons. Many of the benefits have been expressed, including the points outlined in the memo enclosed in this package from Barbara Cook.

In a broader scope, creating a health district puts in place a structure that would better deal with events that our community has not yet experienced. This could be emergencies or disasters caused by weather, terrorism, epidemics and catastrophic accidents.

A health district provides this depth; in personnel, expertise, funding, shared cooperation with a demographically similar town, with state and federal support.

In our Darien / New Canaan Health District Formation Team it became obvious that a part time health department as it exists today is not adequate. Clearly a full time department could be an option, but as the most recent allocation of additional funds to the part time department illustrates, there could be an open ended escalating cost of the part time approach. The fiscal costs to Darien tax payers of a full time department are estimated to be twice that of a district.

The level of state funding and recognition of health districts vs. part time departments should not be minimized. Paying taxes to the state and federal governments and not being able to reclaim them appears short sighted. Federal and private grants are awarded to districts more generously than departments.

Control of the district has been an objection. The district is governed by its board of directors. They are appointed by each town board of selectman. Darien will appoint three and New Canaan will appoint two board of directors. This board weighted in Darien's favor hires the health director who runs the health district.

The local service functions will not change. Darien residents continue to have the same local health permitting and licensing access.

The Memo of Understanding governs other issues that have been raised and should serve to control the scope and power of the district to Darien's needs.

The health department dissolution is allowed within two years of formation.

These facts appear to offer adequate local control.

It is understood that this is a major change for Darien. During three months The Darien / New Canaan Health District Formation Team examined in great detail and heard from many experts with vast experiences with health districts. We agreed that Darien is better served in a district rather than any of the other options. I have to agree that forming a health district partnership with New Canaan it is in the best interests of Darien.

Philip D. Weyhe  
Chairman RTM Public Health and Safety Committee





TO: Karen Armour, Moderator  
Members of the RTM

FROM: Evonne M. Klein *EMK*  
First Selectwoman

RE: Health District

DATE: September 6, 2006

On September 25, 2006 the RTM will meet to discuss and take action on an important step for the Town of Darien. One that will determine how the Town of Darien will deliver its Public Health services to our residents now and in the future. To assist you in preparing for this vote, my office has compiled the attached Health District Informational Packet for your review and a **HEALTH DISTRICT INFORMATIONAL MEETING will be held on THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2006 at 8:15 p.m. in room 206 in Darien Town Hall.**

The materials in this Health District Informational Packet include a summary of the data, analysis and background information that was considered and reviewed by the Health District Planning Committee as well as statements by public officials and support documents. I trust you will find this information useful in making an informed decision to **A) Form a Health District with the Town of New Canaan or B) Remain a Part Time Health Department.**

It is my recommendation that the Town of Darien join with the Town of New Canaan to form a Health District. Currently, Darien has a Part Time Health Department, which has been unable to provide all of the services the Town is required to offer in accordance with Connecticut State Statutes. Our residents deserve to receive all of the services each and every Health Department is required to perform from food establishment inspections, to emergency planning, to school inspections to health education and flu clinics. **Providing some of these services is not good enough.**

The challenge to all elected officials in each municipality is to provide the highest level of services that our residents have come to expect but to do so in a fiscally responsible manner. We are always striving to find opportunities where we can consolidate and integrate services and personnel. Forming a Health District with New Canaan provides us with just such an opportunity to deliver more services while holding our costs flat. It is not only vital that the Town of Darien improve our health services, but it is also essential that we ensure proper funding for these services. A Health District will fund public health services at an appropriate level.

The majority of the Board of Selectmen did not vote to support the formation of a Health District with New Canaan. I respect their position. Enclosed in this packet are statements that my fellow board members made on this subject. As your First Selectman I do have a responsibility to recommend what I believe to be the best course of action for the Town.

This decision is important. I know you will take the time to review the information and attend the Informational Meeting. If you have any questions please email me at [eklein@darienct.gov](mailto:eklein@darienct.gov) or call 656-7386.